

CHAPTER 19.

But our lives are not as simple as that, because we all have sticking points. This is a difficult subject, and I do not pretend I have more than a superficial knowledge of it; but it has such an important influence on human behaviour that it cannot be ignored. No attempt to provide a rational description of human behaviour would be adequate, without acknowledging and recognising its ubiquitous power.

In Shakespeare's Richard III, the Duke of Buckingham, having entered shamelessly into Richard's many schemes and murders, draws the line at murdering the Princes in the Tower. He cannot bring himself to do it. His rather tardy qualms of conscience cost him his life. But sticking points are not always matters of conscience; they may be a reluctance to countenance loss of control. For instance, it may take the form of a refusal to entertain physical risks; not because one is afraid to face the risks involved, but because one knows instinctively that those in charge are not competent to cope with the risks involved. One knows there would probably be a complete loss of control. Sticking points range from Totem Posts, or shibboleths, which one dare not cross, to living relationships which one absolutely refuses to betray. You see it in children trying to break free from "home" in order to marry; they have almost to quarrel with their long-suffering parents in order to do it. It is like learning to swim, and always wanting to keep a foot on the bottom; whereas it is one of the bonuses of advocacy that you must launch out into the deep. Sometimes they take the form of a lack of confidence in one's ability to make important decisions; but they are still there even when one has this confidence. I suppose the two extremes of confidence are when one is filled with the spirit of God, or when one is willing to become diabolical; but in the first case there is the refusal to betray even in Gethsemane, and in the second the threat at any moment of an unwelcome twinge of conscience, such as Buckingham had. You never escape them.

But genes are unaware of sticking points; and one attraction of a theory of human behaviour based on the influence or rule of genes, is that it bypasses this difficult and most unpredictable facet of human character. When one reads of the quarrels between sects of the evolutionary church, the Saltationists versus the Punctuationists, the Cladists versus the Phyleticists, one is reminded of the interminable arguments in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans about circumcision and uncircumcision. These arguments were crucial to people at the time; but nowadays, if one is not bored stiff, one is inclined just to laugh. It is much the same with Evolution; we all, or most of us, accept that star-dust has evolved into Us! And the minute aspects of every twist and turn on the journey are frankly not all that important. The

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quarrels in the Christian Church went on for centuries; Origen and Jerome about doctrine, Arius versus Athanasius more about political power. Their quarrels may have shaped the Church we have inherited; but I hardly think anyone outside theological colleges takes their quarrels seriously nowadays. Perhaps we should; but we don't! Similarly perhaps we should be minutely fascinated by the differing opinions about the speeds and jumps of evolution; but my reaction is to gaze at the wonders of nature, and find these quarrels delightfully absurd.

But the parallel with the sectarian quarrels of the Church prompts the question if this new doctrine of microbiology, that genes explain all, is a new religion? And the answer is, "Of course it is!" It has the hall-marks of religion all over it. Theirs is the only explanation; theirs the only valid theory; there is one true tree of life; anyone who differs is wrong. And this is their sticking point too: that they are unable to argue the merits of their science, without denigrating the Creator. This is the explanation of the biologist's determination to argue that because he thinks he can explain the basics of Evolution up to date, without invoking the Creator, he can conclude the extraordinary non-sequitur that the Creator therefore does not exist; and he can safely ridicule those who believe in God. The idea that the Creator might have set up matter throughout the Universe in such a way that creation could wend its way through the first 16 billion years of its existence without further interference in the material world, never seems to occur to them. It is surprising, because there is a respectable body of opinion that you will never prove, or disprove, the existence of God; and if this opinion is correct, then of course you will not find the Creator's finger-prints in the cumulative selection of genetic change. Even if He is a participant in Evolution, my guess is He would have been careful, like any other terrestrial intruder, not to leave them. And if He does not leave his finger-prints around, so as to deny anyone the insolent pleasure of proving His existence, that does not mean He does not exist. It means that after you die, the immortal part of you is likely to wake up with a sickening realism that you have wasted that side of life, and that it is too late to make amends, or put things right. Either that, or the sleep of eternal death will gradually overwhelm you. Sticking points are a realization, I believe, that more may be at stake than one had thought.

And so with the life of Jesus. I do not know if it was realistic to expect Bethsaida and Capernaum to repent; and if it was, whether Jesus could have brought the Kingdom of Heaven down to earth. What I do know is that the most perfect life we are ever likely to see was murdered; not in a back alley either, but with the full panoply of the State. Hieronymus Bosch was correct too in portraying that it was done with cruel relish by most of those taking part. That way of bringing the Kingdom of Heaven down to earth is now barred and bolted.

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To bring the Kingdom of Heaven down to earth now, means seeking an indirect approach, as Sir Basil Liddell Hart would say. My own ambitions were generally much more modest. I tried to play my part in maintaining a decent just society; in which the guilty were convicted, the innocent acquitted, and the victims of crime were able to sleep soundly without the fear of the midnight knock at the door asking why they had dared to give evidence against a man who thought he was immune. Although I have always thought a man who transgressed should be allowed one chance, if the offence was such as to allow it, I did not think that a man should be allowed 4, 5, or even 6 chances. I read somewhere Julius Caesar's opinion, "The chief penalty in not punishing wrongdoers is the discouragement of the law-abiding; because they say, "What is the point of continuing to be law-abiding, if crime pays?" " And I thought across the two thousand years that separated us, that our eyes met. And he was one of the greatest civil administrators who has ever lived. In the family of course it is different.

But whether you are hoping to inaugurate the Kingdom of Heaven, or simply to help maintain a decent just society, what you need most in this world is not intellectual brilliance, nor ecclesiastical piety, but first and foremost valour.